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ABSTRACT

The research reported in this paper is concerned with: the continued shrinkage of the area commonly known as the Southern black belt -- counties in the old South having a major proportion of their populations consisting of Negroes -- up until 1970; the recent role migration has played in black population loss; and the probable effects of lengthy and heavy out-migration on characteristics of the black population remaining behind. When the combined effects of history and demographic characteristics are examined, it is concluded that the Southern black belt remains unique. It has continued to shrink in size, and even when size is held constant, considerable black population loss has occurred through massive out-migration of youth and young adults. This has resulted in the remaining population being increasingly composed of elderly persons and young children. Although the loss of black population relieves many employment problems, there is no doubt that declines in the proportion of working age blacks has had deleterious effects on the welfare of the elderly and children, since they require a minimal labor force for their support. This they do not currently have. (Author/JM)

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SELECTED DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES AMONG SOUTHERN RURAL BLACKS, 1970: THE CASE OF THE BLACK BELT

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SELECTED DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES AMONG SOUTHERN RURAL BLACKS, 1970: THE CASE OF THE BLACK BELT

by

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Net outmigration from an area often leads to outright population decline and as a demographic phenomenon, movement of people is often conceived as a redistribution of human resources from areas of lower to higher economic potential. Nevertheless, we know that not all segments of population are equally inclined to pack-up and establish roots elsewhere; indeed, it is usually the young, the better educated, and probably the healthier who exhibit proclivities to leave the homes of their birth and childhood in establishing their careers and adult lives while those with established occupations and families, those who are older, and those with educational or physical handicaps remain behind. Extensive outmigration from an area of economic and perhaps social submarginality then, usually not only results in population decline but also has its effects on the area's age structure. Logically, we expect that in situations of this nature there will be greater proportions of young children and aged who, of course, will generally be the dependents of those in working ages. This in turn may have important implications as to labor force composition and activity as well as in perpetuating submarginal conditions in areas characterized by lengthly and heavy outmigration.

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Indeed, as Beale(1964) astutely remarked with respect to many farm communities which, for many decades, lost large numbers of their youth, the pertinent research question may be "Who has remained?" rather than "Who has left?"

Thirty years ago, Rupert Vance(1945:235), among others, noted a rapid shrinking of the area commonly known as the southern black belt--counties in the Old South having a major proportion of their populations consisting of Negroes. Both shrinkage in area as well as in black population was due to large numbers of blacks leaving counties with black majorities for counties in which they constituted lesser proportions as well as to cities throughout the nation. This he attributed to the area's increasing submarginal status and which, at that time was primarily rural and representative of the last vestiges of slave culture in the Old South. Needless to say, even at this time tenant farming remained the primary occupation of black families in the belt although this form of labor relations between blacks and whites was beginning to decline with continued deterioration of the plantattion system and the rapid reduction of cheap labor as black youth who were born and raised in the black belt sought their fortunes in the nation's expanding cities.

In earlier research, Monroe Work(1936) reported that in 1930 the black belt was composed of 190 predominantly black counties in the South and in that year had a combined population of some 3 million Negroes--a sizeable subpopulation in the rural South. Yet, even at this time outmigration among youth was reported to be very heavy and Work's comparative data suggested that the area was already one of the poorest in the nation--especially for blacks.

Against this backdrop, the research to be reported in this paper is concerned with the continued shrinkage of the black belt up until 1970,

the recent role migration has played in shrinkage in terms of black population loss, and the probable effects of lengthly and heavy out-migration on certain characteristics of the black population remaining behind. With regard to the latter, out attention will focus on dependency, labor force characteristics, and labor force participation among balcks found today in the black belt. Finally, we turn to the combined effects of history and demographic characteristics as we expect these have had a major role in perpetuating submarginal conditions in the area as manifest in the high prevalence of poverty.

Recent Population Trends in the Black Belt

By 1970, the number of counties in an eight state area of the South--Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Arkansas---which had black majorities had declined to 97 and they had less than one million Negro residents--a considerable change since 1930. Continued shrinkage of the black belt was no doubt caused by outmigration and there is little evidence of inmigration over the last two decades. Nevertheless, the number of blacks remaining in the black belt is still significant. Altogether, they represent a population approaching in size the combined central city populations of Atlanta, Birmingham, New Orleans, Memphis, and Norfork-Portsmouth.

Apart from size and the large proportion of blacks in these counties which figured at almost 60 percent in 1970, several demographic features distinguish the black belt from other Southern nonmetropolitan territory. First, it has remained more rural than other nonmetropolitan counties in the eight state South--for both blacks and whites alike. At the same time that the black belt is rural by a margin of three to one, only a small proportion of urban blacks lived in a city of any size. Less than half of urban blacks lived in a place having in excess of 10,000 persons

and there were only two cities in the area which could boast of as many as 25,000 inhabitants--Greenville, Mississippi and Selma, Alabama.

Second, the amount of black population losses in the 97 counties composing the current black belt was quite large in both the nineteen fifties and nineteen sixties. In the earlier decade, black population declined by 11 percent and in the most recent by 16 percent (Table 1). By way of contrast, white declines were only two percent over the entire twenty year period. The trend of loss in the black belt is consistent with the findings of Tucker and Lee(1974) who report that between 1960 and 1970 nonmetropolitan counties in the South having populations less than 20 percent black actually experienced black gains of 12 percent although counties having greater proportions of blacks lost by 10 percent over the decade.

Outmigration certainly played an important role in black population decline over the twenty year period as can be seen in Table 1. Black migration losses to the area exceeded 35 percent in both decades and only one state, Virginia, deviated by any significant degree from the overall norm. On the other hand, two out of five black net outmigrants left that portion of the black belt located in Mississippi where net outmigration rates were highest and where 25 of the 97 black belt counties were located. Although county data is not presented in the table, we did find that net outmigration of blacks characterized every county in the belt althouth there were a significant number of immigrant counties with respect to whites. Black outmigrants were mainly composed of those in their late teens and early twenties since beyond age 30 net outmigration fell sharply. In many instances on the county level, we found outmigration losses as high as 70 or 75 percent in these age groups.

Outmigration has thus had the effect of continuing to redistribute blacks from the black belt to other areas--especially young blacks. This suggests that the area continues to be submarginal for atleast the black population that remains behind. Furthermore, we expected that because of the massive drain of youth from the area those left behind would be disproportionately composed of the very young and the elderly.

Dependency in the Black Belt, 1970

The effects of extensive outmigration of youth from the black belt on the population remaining behind can be seen in Table 2 where, for purposes of comparison we have presented comparable data for blacks in the United States at large, the South, and the rural South. According to the table, youth dependency in the black belt is exceedingly high and even higher than that for southern rural blacks. One hundred eight children under the age of 18 for every 100 working age adults 18 through 64 yields a youth dependency ratio that is almost one third higher than for the nation and 18 percent higher than for the South at large. We surmise that were it not for the scarcity of females in child bearing ages(15-44) in the black belt, youth dependency differentials between the belt and the rural South would be greater than those which appear in the table. Our preliminary analyses reveal higher fertility levels among black women in the black belt than in the rural South.

On the other hand, the ratio of those 65 and older to the working age population increases constantly as one moves from the United States to the South, the rural South, and finally to the black belt. While, on the national level there were less than 14 aged black dependents per 100 persons in working ages in the black population, in the black belt there were practically 23, an increase of almost 70 percent in aged dependency.

Combining these ratios shows the black belt to have a total dependency ratio 37 percent higher than for the nation; 20 percent higher than for the South; and even 6 percent higher than for the rural South.

Labor Force

Dependency ratios are rather quick and simple ways of showing possible dependency in a population. However, because of their simplicity they may, in some ways, also be somewhat inaccurate since not all of those 18-64 are "working" as supporters and some persons outside this age range may, in fact, be in the labor force. For this reason we turned to actual labor force participation in the black belt and examined it in terms of trends found in the United States, the South, and the rural South. Table 3 presents select data on labor force participation. In the black belt there were only 262,000 labor force participants of age 16 or over. Considering that the black belt population amounted to almost one million blacks in 1970, this means that for every labor force participant there were almost 2.75 blacks not in the labor force, excepting those WORKERS a few who were less than 16 years of age. In the United States at large this ratio was only 1.85 and even in the rural South only 2.45. The table furthermore shows that the number of nonworkers is not due entirely to differences in age structure between the black belt and other population segments, for even among black males in working ages (in this instance 16-64) labor force participation rates are lower as are rates for those males 65 and older than for the United States, the South, or the rural South. In no small part, a greater number of nonworkers per worker is due to the larger proportions of children, lower rates of labor force participation among black females, and a larger proportion of elderly in the black belt than elsewhere. Interestingly we found there was no greater tendency for children to be working

in the black belt than elsewhere and there were no higher rates of institutionalization or school attendance, even among those 16-64 years of age. Higher rates of unemployment, when coupled with lower rates of labor force participation lead us to believe that hidden black unemployment prevails in the black belt much as it does in the nation's cities.

Another hypothesis was suggested, however, when we examined the relationship between labor force participation rates of black males 16 years old and over and dependency ratios on the county level. For counties in the black belt we found a negative first order correlation (rho) of -0.75 between these two variables. Yet, no significant relationships were found in either direction in examining labor force participation rates of black males 14-15 or those 65 and older against total dependency ratios. We suspect that lower labor force participation among those of working age as it related to higher dependency ratios has at least something to do with household and family structure in the black belt. While we did not examine specifically these variables, we think that large numbers of dependents within a household at least require adult attention and noneconomic services which preclude some persons of working age from seeking anything but intermittant employment outside the home. This problem is not, of course, limited to rural populations, but has been a bone of contention with respect to such groups as urban welfare recipients--especially urban families headed by females with large numbers of children. In addition, it may be that in the black belt there are larger proportions of persons who are disabled and cannot work and are dependent upon family and friends for support. Nevertheless, these speculations are hypotheses at best and await additional research.

Prevalence of Poverty

As Everett Lee has wisely observed, while poverty is difficult to define, the poor are not; they are ordinarily black, of rural residence, and they live in the South(1971). Table 4 confirms his observations, for the prevalence of poverty, according to census criteria, among blacks in the rural South is no less than 75 percent higher than it is nationally and includes better than half of all rural black families in the region. Nevertheless, poverty in the black belt is even higher than in the rural South at large, standing in excess of 60 percent of all families in the area as of 1970. Of families headed by a female in the black belt, over three-fourths were classified as living in poverty and of male-headed families, over 50 percent.

Because of the high prevalence of poverty among black female-headed families, popular conceptions often view poverty as a problem of male absenteeism from the family unit. Nationally, this is certainly true since almost one-half of all black poverty families are headed by females as the table shows. However, in the black belt less than one third of black families in poverty were female-headed in 1970 although there is little difference in the proportion of all units headed by females in comparing the area with the United States at large. Higher prevalence of poverty in the black belt is due to increases in poverty among both male and female headed families and this increase is much sharper for males (160 percent for male-headed families; only 45 percent for families headed by females).

Higher prevalence of poverty in the black belt was much more closely related to high levels of dependency than it was to the proportion of female headed families. Partial correlations between poverty prevalence, proportion of families headed by females, and total dependency ratios showed

that the prevalence of poverty was much more closely related to dependency(rho= +0.79) than it was to the proportion of families headed by females (rho= +0.15).

Conclusions

The southern black belt remains a unique subarea in the rural portion of the southern United States. It has continued to shrink in size and even when size is held constant, considerable black population loss has occurred through massive outmigration of youth and young adults. This, of course, has resulted in the population remaining behind being increasingly composed of elderly persons and young children who represent heavy economic and noneconomic burdens on mature and productive ages.

The loss of black population relieves many of the problems of finding suitable and significant employment for those in working ages in an area which has now been submarginal for many years. Yet, on the other hand, there is no doubt that declines in the proportion of working age blacks has had deleterious effects on the welfare of the elderly and children since they require a minimal labor force for their support. This they do not currently have.

While the problem of poverty and dependency will eventually be solved through continued heavy outmigration over the next several decades, within the interim we cannot forsee anything but higher levels of black dependency and poverty in this submarginal area. Poverty is not strictly an urban phenomenon among the black people of America. and it will remain in the black belt for some years to come.

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Table 1..Population and Net Migration from the Black Belt by Color, 1950-1970.

	Population			Net Migrants	
	1950	1960	1970	1950-1960	1960-1970
Nonwhites					
Alabama	188,065	160,157	130,299	-67,509	-52,735
Arkansas	54,226	49,090	42,627	-20,449	-14,290
Georgia	151,712	131,191	115,052	-57,615	-38,912
Louisiana	91,756	87,143	77,044	-25,110	-23,130
Mississippi	483,163	415,426	335,595	-193,607	-161,364
N.Carolina	67,584	62,687	53,270	-22,438	-18,405
S.Carolina	195,061	179,388	154,179	-72,666	-53,092
Virginia	93,703	95,286	87,266	-19,139	-21,503
TOTAL	1,325,270	1,180,368	995,332	-478,533	-383,436
Whites					
Alabama	67,171	68,479	73,581	-8,047	-1,305
Arkansas	38,656	34,898	34,467	-10,105	-4,324
Georgia	88,265	82,192	83,892	-14,627	-1,231
Louisiana	64,823	63,388	61,397	-9,060	-5,775
Mississippi	239,853	227,726	224,243	-45,756	-19,976
N.Carolina	41,834	40,098	39,130	-5,641	-1,904
S.Carolina	108,972	110,645	116,094	-14,561	-1,886
Virginia	66,602	69,521	71,658	-3,488	-907
TOTAL	716,176	696,947	704,462	-111,285	-37,308

Sources: U. S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No.7, "Components of Population Change, 1950 to 1960, for Counties, Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas, State Economic Areas, and Economic Subregions." U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. 1962.

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Table 2..Black Dependency Ratios, Black Belt, Rural South, South, and the United States, 1970.

	Dependency Ratios		
	Youth	Aged	Total
United States	82.6	13.5	96.1
South	91.8	17.1	108.9
Rural South	104.9	18.6	123.5
Black Belt	108.4	22.7	131.1

Source: U. S. Bureau of the Census. U. S. Census of Population:1970. General Population Characteristics. PC(1)-1B, United States Summary, Table 52; individual state volumes in PC(1)-B series, Tables 20 and 35.

Table 3..Select Labor Force Characteristics of Blacks in the United States, the South, the Rural South, and the Black Belt, 1970.

	United States	South	Rural South	Black Belt
Ratio, Not in Labor Force/ Labor Force[a]	1.85	2.13	2.45	2.75
Percent of Total Population 16 years+ in Labor Force	57.2	53.4	49.8	45.9
Percent of Female Population 16 years+ in Labor Force	47.4	43.5	37.6	34.8
Percent of Female Labor Force Unemployed	7.7	8.7	10.1	12.4
Percent of Male Population 16-64 in Labor Force	74.5	72.3	70.3	66.0
Percent of Male Population 65+ in Labor Force	23.5	22.2	21.8	20.9
Percent of Male Labor Force Unemployed (16+)	6.3	5.4	5.3	6.9

[a]Those not in the labor force include all children under the age of 16 as well as those 16 and over who are not seeking employment. Labor force only includes those 16 years old and over.

Source: U. S. Bureau of the Census, U. S. Census of Population: 1970. General Social and Economic Characteristics, PC(1)-1C, United States Summary, Table 90; individual state volumes in PC(1)-C series, Tables 53 and 126.

Table 4..Select Poverty Characteristics of Black Families in the United States, the South, the Rural South, and the Black Belt, 1970.

	United States	South	Rural South	Black Belt
Percent of all Families Below Poverty Level	29.8	43.2	52.6	60.3
Percent of Female Headed Families Below Poverty	53.0	65.2	71.0	76.7
Percent of Male Headed Families Below Poverty	21.1	35.6	47.8	54.9
Percent of All Families Headed by Females	27.4	25.7	20.8	24.8
Percent of all Poverty Families Headed by Females	48.8	38.8	28.1	31.5

Source: U. S. Bureau of the Census, U. S. Census of Population: 1970, General Social and Economic Characteristics, PC(1)-1C, United States Summary, Table 95; individual state volumes in PC(1)-C series, Tables 58 and 128.

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